

What we are going to do:

A. Discuss these themes:

(1) the conflict between personal inclinations and group obligations

- Ethan--between doing what he thinks will make him happy and what he believes to be morally right
- family responsibilities vs. individual desires (that take the form of defiance, arguments, excuses, etc.)

(2) making choices

- How much of who we are depends on our circumstances?
- How greatly does our own attitude towards these circumstances affect our choices?
- Is it possible to follow one's own inclinations as well as fulfill family or group responsibilities?

(3) the failure of suicide to resolve problems

- What alternatives are there?
- What way can you resolve your issues?
- Is it a legitimate option?

B. Respond to these questions (from SparkNotes):

- How does Wharton use symbolism to reinforce plot development in *Ethan Frome*?
- Discuss the relationship between the physical environment of Starkfield and the nature of the characters' inner states.
- What does the presence of the unnamed "narrator" in the story's introduction and conclusion contribute to the effect of the novel?
- Discuss the novel's portrayal of Zeena. Does her harshness seem realistic?
- In your opinion, do Ethan, Mattie, and Zeena deserve their fates? Does the story aim to teach its readers a lesson? Which aspects of the novel make us sympathize with the characters, and which aspects seem to ask us to pass negative judgment?

**All of this, along with class discussion, will serve to prepare you for an essay examination on some future date.